



PORTSMOUTH
HISTORICAL SOCIETY
10 MIDDLE STREET, PORTSMOUTH, NH 03801
603.436.8433 • WWW.PORTSMOUTHISTORY.ORG

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Contact: Meredith Affleck, Manager, Exhibitions & Programming

Phone: 603.570.2493

Email: meredith@portsmouthhistory.org

PHOTO CAPTION: A quilt square submitted for the community quilt, made in the classic mariner's compass design, featuring the spire of North Church. The square celebrates what the maker calls her "Portsmouth adventures."

"THREADS: A COMMUNITY QUILT FOR 2020" OPENS AT PORTSMOUTH HISTORICAL SOCIETY ON FRIDAY, AUGUST 7

Quietly, behind the scenes, a team of masked historians has been assembling a landmark exhibition of some uniquely American art. Created by the nonprofit Portsmouth Historical Society, "Threads: A Community Quilt for 2020" opens at the Society's Academy Gallery adjacent to the Discover Portsmouth Welcome Center on Friday, August 7.

"When it became clear back in March and April that COVID-19 would threaten loans to our main art exhibition this year," says PHS executive director Brian LeMay, "we took a closer look at our own museum collections, and we tried to think about what would be most meaningful to exhibit at this challenging moment in history. Over the years, we've acquired many historical quilts, and quilts have come to be recognized as both an important medium of fine art and a distinctively American art form. Quilts are colorful, they tell incredible stories, and they are comforting."

"We have three stunning silk quilts in excellent condition that appear to have been made by the same woman, Anne Peirce Drown Hamm," says exhibitions manager Meredith Affleck. "We have what is called a 'bolt-ends' quilt top that reveals surprising facts about the British textile industry. And, of course, there's the worn quilt that once belonged to Ruth Blay, who was hanged in Portsmouth after a notorious trial in 1768."

"Frequently, if not universally, quilts were made by women," says "Threads" curator Gerald W. R. Ward. "Regardless of how they descended down the years, quilts can represent what sociologists call 'icons of continuity' between generations."

Intriguing examples of 19th- and 20th-century quilts from "Threads" can be seen on the PHS website. They include brilliant colors, dizzying designs, and complex patterns. From simple, practical quilts made from cotton scraps to elaborate creations of brocade, velvet, and satin, this exhibition highlights the exciting range of this fabric art form. The exhibition also promises a number of surprises. Famed documentary filmmaker Ken Burns, an avid quilt collector, has lent an item soon to be revealed. The Seacoast African American Cultural Center, located within the Discover Portsmouth facility, has loaned a rare 1930s quilt crafted by workers at a rubber plantation in Liberia. On the second floor of the gallery, local expert quilters have loaned pieces in a variety of styles and techniques in a display of just how wide-ranging the modern art of quilting is. With everything from traditional to abstract quilts, classic baby blankets to inventive pictorial wall hangings, and even clothing, this show is bound to inspire crafter and art-lover alike.

A highlight of the exhibition will be the Community Quilt, now being assembled from more than fifty original squares created by New Hampshire and seacoast families during their months of “sheltering at home” due to the pandemic. Until the quilt is ready in September, individual squares will be on display in the gallery. In fact, the overwhelming response to this project has led PHS staff members to consider creating a second Community Quilt. Those wishing to contribute quilt squares are invited to download instructions at www.PortsmouthHistory.org the PHS website.

“Threads” is possible because of the generosity of several local businesses who have continued to donate funds despite these uncertain times. Corporate sponsors include Hoefle, Phoenix, Gormley & Roberts, P. A.; Performance Business Solutions; Charles Schwab/Charles B. Riopel; Piscataqua Savings Bank; and DTC Lawyers.

In addition to “Threads” in the adjacent Academy Gallery, the Discover Portsmouth Welcome Center continues to offer regular historical walking tours, featuring wireless headsets that offer both excellent sound quality and safe social distancing. The Museum Shop is stocked with Portsmouth-oriented gifts, books, and souvenirs (including handmade facemasks!), the purchase of which helps support the Historical Society. Plus, the Society has virtual lectures on quilting and textile arts and regular updates on museum events and collections available through their website.

Meanwhile, at the Seacoast African American Cultural Center, accessible from inside the Discover Portsmouth Welcome Center, is “Obama: An Intimate Portrait,” a major exhibition of photographs by Pete Souza, former White House photographer for the Obama administration. This stunning show is accompanied by “Obama: An Ancestral Legacy,” an exhibit featuring objects from SAACC's collection that highlight Obama's African diaspora heritage and America's history of foreign policy in Africa, curated by University of New Hampshire students. For details, tickets, and hours visit www.saacc-nh.org online.

For the health and safety of all guests, volunteers, and staff members, masks are required to be worn at all times and social distancing rules are to be observed. Free masks are available, and hand sanitizing stations are located strategically around the facility.

Portsmouth Historical Society’s air-conditioned Welcome Center and galleries at 10 Middle Street now feature over \$250,000 in improvements, including new, universally-accessible restrooms and automatic gallery doors. Less modern but equally interesting is the 1758 John Paul Jones House Museum just across the street, the only historic house interior currently open in Portsmouth. For safety reasons, a limited number of guests will be allowed in the historic house at the same time. To avoid waiting, it’s recommended that tickets for self-guided tours be purchased in advance. Tickets may also be purchased online for walking tours of historic Portsmouth, led by expert guides throughout the day, departing from the front doors of the Discover Portsmouth Welcome Center.

For hours, museum and walking tour tickets, Society memberships, and the latest updates, please visit www.portsmouthhistory.org or call 603-436-8433.